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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 003609

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/12/2026
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN ELECTIONS: THE EMBASSY'S TAKE ON VOTING
DAY

REF: A. CARACAS 03530
[B](#). CARACAS 03531
[C](#). CARACAS 03598

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT R. DOWNES FOR 1.4 (D)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Post sent out roughly 40 observers to seven states and Caracas for the December 3 presidential election. Although they did not have official observer credentials, Embassy observers were able to enter approximately 75 percent of the roughly 120 voting centers visited. Embosffs were thus able to provide real-time election information to the Department, enhance post's ability to assess electoral developments, and analyze international observer and National Electoral Council reports. With the notable exception of one team that was briefly detained, the day proceeded without incident. Embassy election observers noted isolated voting irregularities, such as misuse of government resources, but nothing that suggested a systematic pattern of electoral fraud. End Summary.

Post Sends Observers Far and Wide

[1](#)2. (C) Post sent approximately 40 embosffs to Caracas and seven states, including Zulia (opposition challenger Manuel Rosales' base), Barinas (President Chavez' home state), Miranda, Carabobo, Aragua, Vargas, and Anzoategui. Four of these areas (Caracas, Zulia, Miranda, and Carabobo) contain Venezuela's largest electorates. The others, though important, rarely attract international attention. In fact, only a handful of Embosffs reported actually seeing or hearing about EU, OAS, or other National Electoral Council (CNE)-accredited observers along their routes.

[1](#)3. (C) With the exception of the U.S. Consular Agent in Maracaibo, who was accredited as part of the local diplomatic corps, Embosffs were not officially credentialed. Post notified the Foreign Ministry of our intention to visit voting centers. Nevertheless, our observers gained entry into 75 percent of the more than 120-plus polling places visited. In most cases electoral officials and military elements guarding the voting centers were very receptive to

observers, eagerly showing them around and explaining the process, even in pro-Chavez neighborhoods. One team and their vehicle were blocked by military authorities outside a polling station for less than an hour, but were released after Embassy intervention.

14. (C) The reports from our observers gave post real-time insight into election day events and were fed into post's sitreps (Refs A and B). This information was invaluable, given Venezuela's polarized news coverage and the BRV's threat to suspend broadcasts had disturbances occurred. Emboffs were able to watch for patterns in irregularities, discrimination, or intimidation that could have suggested a disadvantage for opposition supporters. Occasionally voters approached Emboffs to ensure they documented issues and some of these observations were passed to international observation missions, facilitating resolution of problems.

15. (C) Emboffs also helped verify opposition contacts' claims that they would have witnesses in every electoral table, which would have helped Post evaluate fraud claims or potential requests for Embassy support in the event of a disputed race. Emboffs also verified that election day rumors of unrest were exaggerated, which informed the Embassy's security posture and operating plans the next day. This function became particularly vital as voting centers closed and people gathered at centers to ensure electoral authorities followed proper procedures for the audit. Finally, post's program showed Venezuelans a friendly USG face in a wide range of places to counter anti-US propaganda from the BRV.

Emboffs Detect Irregularities, but Nothing Systematic

16. (C) Emboffs' observations tracked with those of

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international observers previously reported (Ref C). Election day was calm, with voters in more of a festive than contentious mood. Fingerprint (digital scanning) machines were the main cause for many initial delays in voting in the morning, followed by broken machines and late openings. Although technicians were on site to repair the voting machines quickly, replacements, when necessary, took as many as four hours to arrive at the centers. This frequently frustrated voters, who demanded electoral officials adopt manual voting, as required by law if machines are not replaced. There were few incidents of voter intimidation reported, but some observers saw pro-Chavez supporters near some centers apparently keeping track of who had voted (and presumably who had not).

17. (C) Observers in Barinas and Aragua states reported seeing machines hooked up to transmit data before polls closed in violation of the CNE's agreement with the opposition. Some voters complained about blank voting receipts and were allowed to vote again. To a lesser extent, there were also reports of receipts listing a candidate name other than that chosen by the voter. Neither discrepancy interfered with the election's outcome. There were also isolated incidents of poll workers or pro-government supporters, mainly in Chavez' home state of Barinas, assisting voters at the voting machine, potentially compromising the secrecy of the vote. Emboffs noted political party witnesses from both major candidates in almost all centers, although the Rosales campaign did not have witnesses in some barrios in western Caracas. Most appeared to get along well, except in Chavez' home town of Sabaneta, where an opposition witness told poloff he was constantly overruled by his pro-Chavez counterparts and poll workers.

18. (C) In many cases, electoral officials deferred to Plan Republica participants to resolve problems, violating the

plan's rules restricting soldiers to guarding voting centers and materials only. Emboffs reported variation and confusion in closing practices as some centers apparently waited for orders to close from the CNE instead of closing at 4 pm or later if voters were in line, as stated in electoral law. Like last year, and also in violation of election rules, military officials had a larger role in determining when polls close than they should have. Defense Minister Baduel told the media in the days following the election that the military is investigating complaints about Plan Republica elements exceeding their legal role.

Comment: Lesson Learned

19. (C) Like last year's effort, Post found its informal observation effort extremely useful as a tool to gauge electoral developments. Embassy volunteers deepened their Venezuela expertise. Post was able to indirectly support the democratic process, a key objective of our Venezuela policy, by providing another, though modest, check against potential electoral day irregularities. The Embassy was also able to provide detailed information on election irregularities to the international observers and to the opposition as they occurred. Post was also well-positioned to report on and deal with election-related disturbances had any occurred. Finally, Post's credibility when expressing concerns to other electoral observation missions and diplomatic counterparts was boosted by its detailed knowledge of developments.

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